United Nations A/CN.10/PV.225 (Resumption 1)

General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

225th Meeting (Resumption 1)
Friday, 19 March 1999, 10.00 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Martinov ..... (Bulgaria)

In the absence of the Chairman, Ms. Arce de Jeannet (Mexico), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was resumed at 10.15 a.m., Friday, 19 March 1999.

The Acting Chairperson (*interpretation from Spanish*): I declare open the resumed 1998 organizational session and the 225th plenary meeting of the Disarmament Commission.

As in past years, the Disarmament Commission is convened briefly this morning to deal with its unfinished organizational matters related to the 1999 substantive session. These include the decision on the dates of the session, the election of the Chairman of the Commission for the 1999 substantive session, the election of Bureau members for remaining vacancies, the appointment of the Chairman of Working Group II and, finally, the adoption of a draft programme of work for the first week of the substantive session.

Election of the Chairman and other officers

The Acting Chairperson (*interpretation from Spanish*): Allow me first to draw the attention of delegations to document A/CN.10/L.43, which contains the agenda of the organizational session that was adopted in December 1998. The third item on the agenda is the election of the Chairman and other officers of the Bureau. In accordance with the principle of geographical rotation for the chairmanship of the Commission, the candidacy for the post of Chairman for 1999 should come from the Group of African States.

In this connection, I am very pleased to inform the members of the Commission that the Group of African States has endorsed the candidacy of Mr. Maged Abdelaziz of Egypt for the post of Chairman of the Disarmament Commission for 1999.

If I hear no objection, I will take it that it is the wish of the Commission to elect by acclamation Mr. Maged Abdelaziz of Egypt as Chairman.

It was so decided.

The Acting Chairperson (*interpretation from Spanish*): Mr. Abdelaziz of Egypt has thus been elected Chairman of the Disarmament Commission for the 1999 substantive session. Mr. Abdelaziz, who is Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of Egypt, is a very distinguished diplomat and has been very well known in the United Nations for many years, particularly for his valuable experience and wide knowledge in the field of disarmament. During recent years, Mr. Abdelaziz has been an active participant in the sessions of the General Assembly, the First Committee and the Disarmament Commission, as well as other disarmament forums and conferences. With such broad experience in the United Nations and with all his expertise in the field of disarmament, I believe that the Disarmament Commission will conduct its business efficiently and successfully under the leadership of Mr. Maged Abdelaziz. Allow me, on behalf of the Commission, to congratulate Mr. Abdelaziz on his election to this important post of responsibility and to wish him every success in the discharge of his duties.

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I would now like to invite Mr. Maged Abdelaziz, the Chairman of the Disarmament Commission, to take the Chair.

The Chairman: At the outset, allow me to express my sincere gratitude to members for their confidence in electing me Chairman of the United Nations Disarmament Commission for the 1999 substantive session. It is a great honour for me and for my country, Egypt, to serve in this post. I would also like to thank Ms. María Angélica Arce de Jeannet, Vice-Chairperson, for introducing me so nicely today and to express the confidence that our work together is going to be very fruitful.

The 1999 disarmament calendar is rich with events. We believe that the international climate is propitious for various undertakings in the field of disarmament. I also hope that this overall atmosphere will positively influence the work of the Disarmament Commission. Without minimizing the existing obstacles, I consider the consensus on the issues before the Commission politically feasible and practically attainable. This, in turn, makes our job so much more challenging and intellectually stimulating. To be successful in discharging my duties, I count the support of each and every one of you.

Allow me now to proceed with the election of the other members of the Bureau, namely eight Vice-Chairmen and a Rapporteur. In this connection, I would like to inform the Commission that the Secretariat has received notifications from various regional groups to the following effect: first, that the Group of African States has endorsed the candidacy of Mr. Moctar Ouane, Ambassador of Mali, for the post of Vice-Chairman of the Commission from the African region; secondly, that the Group of Asian States has endorsed the candidacies of Mr. Jargalsaikhany Enkhsaikhan, Ambassador of Mongolia, and Mr. Felipe Mabilangan, Ambassador of the Philippines, for the two posts of Vice-Chairmen from the Asian region; thirdly, that the Group of Eastern European States has endorsed the candidacies of Mr. Vice Skračić of Croatia and Mr. Miloš Koterec of Slovakia for the two posts of Vice-Chairmen from that region; and fourthly, that the Group of Western European and other States has endorsed the candidacies of Mr. Pier Benedetto Francese of Italy and Mr. Rui Vinhas of Portugal for the two posts of Vice-Chairmen from that region.

If I hear no objection, I will take it that the Commission wishes to elect by acclamation the above-mentioned representatives as Vice-Chairmen of the Commission for the 1999 substantive session.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I would now like to turn to the election of the Rapporteur of the Commission. The candidate for that post should come from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

In this regard, I am pleased to announce that the Group has nominated Miss Gaile Ann Ramoutar of Trinidad and Tobago to the post of Rapporteur.

If I hear no objection, I will take it that the Commission wishes to elect Miss Gaile Ann Ramoutar of Trinidad and Tobago as Rapporteur of the Disarmament Commission for the 1999 substantive session.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I wish to extend my warm congratulations to all the Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur for their election to the Bureau of the Commission. I am sure that they will make an important contribution to the smooth conduct of the work of the Commission this year.

Organizational matters

The Chairman: As members may recall, during the organizational session in December we elected the Chairmen of Working Groups I and III on nuclear-weapon-free zones and conventional arms, respectively. It gives me pleasure to inform the Commission that Mr. Arizal Effendi, Deputy Permanent Representative of Indonesia, has been nominated by the Asian Group to the post of the Chairman of Working Group II on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

If I hear no objection, I will take that the Commission wishes to elect Ambassador Arizal Effendi to the chairmanship of Working Group II.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: On behalf of the Disarmament Commission, I congratulate Ambassador Effendi on his election and wish him luck in discharging his important duties as Chairman of Working Group II. I assure him of my full cooperation and that of the other members of the Bureau as he guides the work of the Group.

We turn now to the new dates for the 1999 session of the Commission, to the general programme of work set out in document A/CN.10/1999/CRP.1, and to the timetable for the first week of the session, contained in informal paper 1.

As I am sure members are aware, the original dates specified by the General Assembly for the next substantive session of the Disarmament Commission were 26 April to 14 May 1999. I am pleased to inform members that, after thorough consultations, there has been general agreement on changing those dates to 12 April to 30 April 1999. I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the efforts exerted by all delegations and by Mr. Dhanapala, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, to reach that general agreement. My appreciation goes in particular to delegations that might encounter logistical difficulties as a result of the change.

We turn now to the general programme of work and to the working timetable for the first week of the session. Members may have noticed that, thanks to the extensive efforts of the Secretary of the Disarmament Commission, Mr. Timur Alasaniya, and his team, and thanks to the excellent support of Mr. Vadim Perfiliev, Director of the General Assembly Affairs Division, we shall now have two large conference rooms at our disposal throughout the duration of the substantive session. I am very glad that this has happened, especially since this is the last year for the consideration of the three substantive items on our agenda. On behalf of the Disarmament Commission, I thank the members of the Secretariat for their excellent work and for their successful efforts to secure the necessary facilities for the Commission.

In order to make proper use of the facilities accorded to us, a proposed timetable for the period 12 to 16 April has been worked out after consultations with the Chairmen of the three Working Groups. This consists of two days of general debate, followed by three days of Working Group meetings, with two morning and two afternoon meetings scheduled for each day; this means that each Working Group would have four meetings in the course of the first week. I hope that this will be a good start and will enhance the possibility of our reaching agreement on all the items on our agenda.

May I take it that the general programme of work and the working timetable for the first week of the session are acceptable?

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I am pleased to announce that, in the spirit of starting early on the work of the Working Groups, as agreed at the last session, Ambassador Emilio Izquierdo, Chairman of Working Group I, on item 4, has prepared a new paper for consideration by that Working Group at the substantive session. That paper is now available in all languages.

I know too that the Chairmen of Working Groups II and III are engaged in consultations on their respective papers. I am confident that this spirit of early consultations and of minimizing differences will help us greatly when we reach the stage of our substantive work. I wish them all the best in their consultations. It would be most helpful if all these papers could be prepared in time for them to be translated and made available for the beginning of the substantive session.

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) (*interpretation from French*): At the outset, Sir, let me congratulate you on your election to the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission. Your ability and experience will be valuable assets in enabling us to succeed as we enter the final phase of our work on the three substantive agenda items before us. I assure you that my delegation will cooperate fully with you and with the other members of the Bureau. I am grateful also to the members of the Department for Disarmament Affairs and the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services for all their efforts to help us address the logistical problems that have arisen with regard to our work.

I should like now to ask you, Sir, and to ask Messrs. Dhanapala, Alasaniya and Perfiliev, whether it might be possible to find rooms that are more practical for the work of the Working Groups. I note from the working timetable that Conference Room 6 is assigned only once, while the Economic and Social Council Chamber and Conference Room 4 are more commonly assigned. It seems to me that Conference Rooms 5, 6 and 7 would be far more practical for consultations of this kind, especially as we approach the closing stage of our consideration of these three items. I understand the difficulties faced by the Secretariat, but it may be worth while to make one final effort to settle this problem.

The Chairman: The question of conference rooms is not the sole responsibility of the Secretariat; in fact, we have been consulting on this issue with all concerned, including Messrs. Dhanapala, Perfiliev and Alasaniya. The fact that we cannot determine beforehand how many delegations will show up for any given meeting of a

Working Group makes it necessary always to have a bigger room. Originally, when we were discussing the dates, it was proposed that we might use one of the smaller rooms to which the representative of Algeria has just referred. Conference Room 5, for instance, will accommodate up to 50 or 60 persons. But there could be a Working Group meeting at which more than 50 or 60 persons appeared. Moreover, not everybody would be sitting behind a microphone, which would create other logistical problems, with interpretation — which all representatives are eager to have so that they can follow the discussion in their own languages. That is why the incoming Bureau pressured the Secretariat to secure two large rooms.

But at the same time, I am sure Commission members noticed in the programme of work contained in informal paper 1 that the Commission will have Conference Room C available all the time for the small gatherings or informal meetings referred to by the representative of Algeria — that is, meetings not requiring simultaneous interpretation or other conference facilities.

I do not know if this seems satisfactory, but we will make all possible efforts, including, if necessary, discussing the matter on the spot with the Secretariat, and we will see whether the request can be fulfilled at that time or not.

As the representative is nodding his assent, I will consider this question resolved.

Before closing the meeting I would like to inform representatives that the list of speakers will be open at the Secretariat, and interested delegations should inscribe their names on the list as soon as possible for the general debate. I am told that the phone extension for signing up to speak is 5143.

Does any delegation wish to raise another issue under "Other business" before we conclude our meeting?

Mr. Hoey (Ireland): Allow me to offer you, Mr. Chairman, my warmest congratulations and to state how pleased I am to see you directing our work.

My question is really more a technical one. I had not anticipated that you were going to invite us to present our papers so that they could be translated into all languages at the beginning of the Working Group. Obviously, I am very happy to do that, and I offer my warmest congratulations to my colleague from Ecuador, who has done so already. As you rightly said, Sir, I am still holding some consultations, and I unfortunately will be away for the next two weeks, so I will try and hold those consultations as quickly as possible.

The question I would just like to ask is, how long in advance do you actually need the paper in order to have it translated into all languages? Are we talking about two or three days, or do you need a longer period of time?

The Chairman: I give the floor to the Secretary of the Commission to answer this question.

Mr. Alasaniya (Secretary of the Disarmament Commission): I would say that two days will suffice for translation if we are talking about a normal-size paper, of a reasonable volume. If it is something more than 10 pages then I would require three days.

By the way, as I understand it, when the decision was taken last year it was not obligatory for all Chairmen to present their papers before the beginning of the Commission. However, it was desirable, and the Chairman of Working Group I, as I understand it, acted on that desirability in order to give the Group as much advanced notice as possible of his intention to present the paper. So of course we will welcome other Chairmen who follow this procedure.

Mr. Abou-Hadid (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I would like first of all to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the post of Chairman of the Disarmament Commission, and to congratulate the other officers of the Bureau on their election as well.

We had two questions. The first was already posed by the representative of Ireland and has been answered. As regards the second, we would like to know about the consultations that have been undertaken by the Chairmen of the Working Groups. We would like account to be taken of the States that have submitted papers concerning the three items, and we would like to know with whom those consultations are being undertaken.

The Chairman: In fact, the consultations to which I referred have just started, and I am sure that the Chairmen of the Working Groups will consult will all concerned regarding their working papers and regarding what other papers were presented during previous sessions.

I am sure that the representative of Syria will be properly consulted on all papers before the substantive session of the Commission.

The meeting rose at 10.50 p.m.